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ABSTRACT

The At-Risk Youth Task Force of the State Employment and Training Commission concluded that a generation of young people faced underemployment or unemployment as a result of the increased skill demands required by the global economy. Two interrelated phenomena adversely affected the ability of a majority of young people to succeed in the labor market. First, families and communities provided less nurturing and support and fewer role models; youth found the support they needed by relying on their own emotional resources and those of their peer group. Second, most entrants into the labor market required a higher educational level. To enhance prospects of youth for obtaining the level of employment-related skills required for success in the modern labor market, schools were to be made more responsive to the employment needs of student, with their orientation and curriculum more closely correlated to labor market demands. The task force developed a definition of at-risk youth that acknowledged the pervasiveness of the problem. The task force made the following recommendations: develop a comprehensive, employment-oriented program; create youth apprenticeship opportunities; develop joint strategies to link cooperative education programs between secondary and postsecondary institutions; expand summer work experiences; establish closer collaboration between higher education and public schools; expand the School-Based Youth Services Program; and expand the New Jersey Youth Corps Program. (YLB)

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Youth at Work:

Making it in the Global Economy

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EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING COMMISSION

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September 1993

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A REPORT OF THE AT-RISK YOUTH TASK FORCE

NEW JERSEY STATE EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING COMMISSION

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Executive Summary

At-Risk Youth Task Force

The At-Risk Youth Task Force of the State Employment and Training Commission has concluded that a generation of young people are facing under-employment or unemployment as a result of the increased skill demands required by the global economy. This report offers a broad set of recommendations to improve the way young people are prepared for the "world of work."

The work of the Task Force followed the course developed within the State Employment and Training Commission's ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System*** approved by Governor Florio in March 1992. The Plan establishes a comprehensive series of recommendations to improve New Jersey's workforce readiness system. The primary focus of the At-Risk Youth Task Force is to offer recommendations designed to meet the employment, training and education needs of a specific group: *at-risk youth*. The recommendations would then be implemented through a revitalized worker preparation system as envisioned by the Plan.

The recommendations contained in this report must be understood as more than the sum of their parts. New Jersey and the nation need to construct a one-track educational system that will offer all students occupational and academic experiences. The "general" course of study must be abolished in favor of one that exposes all students to an enriched and varied course of study, balancing theoretical and applied learning. The goal of such an approach is to offer students the chance to go on to college, engage in tech-prep, cooperative education, apprenticeship or some other school-to-work transition program. To accomplish this goal, specific linkages between secondary and postsecondary schools, business, government and unions are important to insure that all students have the opportunity to extend their education through, at a minimum, grade fourteen.

The recommendations that follow offer many more choices for young people and improve the labor pool for employers. One of the workforce readiness system's greatest challenges is meeting the employment needs of at-risk youth. The Task Force strongly believes that the adoption and implementation of its recommendations will substantially reduce the dropout rate, provide far greater opportunity to youth to obtain decent employment and, in the end, reconnect a generation of youth to the mainstream of American life.

The Task Force offers the following recommendations:

1 Develop a comprehensive, employment-oriented program for at-risk youth that provides opportunities for career exploration, employment experiences, and a transition to the "world of work." This program must be available to **both** in-school and out-of-school youth.

2 Create youth apprenticeship opportunities as described in the proposed "National Youth Apprenticeship Act of 1992." The first step in shaping a new national concept of youth apprenticeship is to develop a strategy for preserving the successful aspects of traditional apprenticeships while expanding those approaches identified within "youth apprenticeship."

3 Develop a joint strategy between the Departments of Education and Higher Education to link cooperative education programs between secondary and postsecondary institutions and to improve their quality.

4 Expand summer work experiences for in-school youth through partnerships between businesses and the schools and through programs such as structured employment training, job tryout and shadowing.

5 Enhance and expand the Department of Higher Education's efforts to establish closer collaboration between institutions of higher education and the public schools. Successful pre-collegiate academic programs, like *College Bound*, must be made available to more students.

6 Expand and strengthen the Department of Human Services School-Based Youth Services Program by adding an employment component that includes, e.g., job tryout, community service work experience, and job shadowing.

7 Expand the New Jersey Youth Corps Program by including an explicit vocational education component while maintaining the program's current philosophy.

NEW JERSEY EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING COMMISSION

Overview

During the Task Force's deliberations, it became apparent that the emergence of the global economy affected the way America and New Jersey need to think about the employment prospects for young people. This understanding provided the framework through which the Task Force analyzed employment problems and offered recommendations for at-risk youth.

Task forces that focus on at-risk youth traditionally recommend programs that provide special attention to the target population. In that sense, this report also strongly advocates that those with the greatest need be given priority when resources are allocated. Yet, the Task Force felt that attention also needed to be paid to the present and future employment problems of this entire generation of young people.

The Task Force found that two interrelated phenomena adversely affect the ability of a majority of young people to succeed in the labor market. The first phenomenon is that families and communities provide less nurturing and support and fewer role models than was common in the past. Today, youth find the support they need by relying on their own emotional resources and those of their peer group. They do so at a time when the dangers posed by violence, drugs, and diseases, such as AIDS, are increasing rapidly. These changes are evident everywhere—in the suburbs and the cities and among all racial and ethnic groups. While these problems appear to be pervasive, overwhelming evidence suggests that Black and Hispanic youth, who suffer most from poverty and other forms of social neglect, are most likely to face under-employment or unemployment throughout their working lives.

A second phenomenon is the change in the work-related skills demanded by the global economy. Young people who drop out of school or do not continue their education beyond high school are in danger of being unable to obtain good jobs at good wages. The educational demands of the economy will require that grade fourteen be the minimal educational level for entrance into the labor market. Does this apply to all young people? No, but the trend is clear: *most entrants into the labor market of the 1990s and beyond will require a higher educational level than ever before in the history of our nation.*

The Task Force, therefore, advocates fundamental changes in the way young people are prepared to enter the labor market. These changes not only acknowledge that the risk of under-employment and unemployability has intensified for our most vulnerable youth, but that it will also affect those youth once thought immune from such problems.

Background

The work of the State Employment and Training Commission's At-Risk Youth Task Force represents a continuation of activities that began several years ago. Fortunately, many of the recommendations offered in the draft report of that first Task Force have been implemented. Of major importance is the establishment of FamilyNet which institutionalizes collaboration among eight State Departments. Working with business and community organizations, FamilyNet seeks to empower communities and schools to coordinate services that children and families need - in school and out. This creative alliance of agencies answers a major concern of the draft report by assuring comprehensive services for at-risk youth and their families.

The Task Force believes that FamilyNet deserves particular recognition for establishing a bold new process for changing the way schools and the community collaborate for the best interests of children. It is a "holistic" approach to providing youth and families with a comprehensive set of necessary support services. By creating regional teams of state officials to work directly with schools, FamilyNet has created "user friendly" support networks operating out of the schools.

The ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System*** represents another response to the needs of at-risk youth. The Plan, accepted by Governor Jim Florio in March of 1992, , offers a comprehensive series of recommendations for improving the quality of the entire workforce readiness system. The framework articulated in the Plan provides mechanisms for integrating policies and programs at the state and local levels to insure a seamless web of workforce readiness services. This is particularly important for young people who need to have their understanding and choices about careers expanded.

The Current Situation

"There is a sharp disparity between what Americans do for college-bound youth and what they do for the Forgotten Half."

The Forgotten Half - Final Report 1988

This report focuses on the employment needs of the "forgotten half" - those youth who are not college-bound. There are specific recommendations in the Plan to address the needs of this population, most notably those involving tech-prep, school-to-work transitions and connecting social support services to the workforce readiness system. These youth, the forgotten-half, are most vulnerable to being unable to succeed in the global economy.

The State Employment and Training Commission has a special interest in the future of the at-risk youth population in New Jersey. Aside from a basic concern that all New Jerseyans, irrespective of their life circumstance, receive equal opportunity to achieve success, the evolving labor market and demography suggest that a growth economy will require the participation of all citizens.

The business community is concerned about the availability of qualified entry level and skilled workers. Global competition places a high priority on the skills of the workforce as the key ingredient of productivity. A modern economy requires skilled and adaptable workers who can fill jobs in technology-dependent industries. In order to provide the employees needed for a growth economy, the SETC has placed place a high priority on preparing at-risk youth for the labor market.

At-risk youth have an especially difficult set of barriers to overcome to succeed in jobs created by the global economy. They frequently lack successful role models, good work habits and academic and career motivation. As a result of these deficits, the temptations of the street may lead them astray. School is the **only** institution that touches the lives of all these youngsters. Hence, the transformation of educational institutions into learning environments capable of meeting the rigorous intellectual and employability demands of the next century is of enormous importance.

Changes in Work Ethic Attitudes

The changes in American society and culture that have made so many young people socially and economically vulnerable are complex. The nation's culture has experienced deep, pernicious changes in attitudes concerning learning and work. It cannot be assumed, as it once was, that a respect for learning or the value of work is universally fostered among the young. Nor can it be assumed that all people come from communities populated with role models of successful students or workers. In short, there has been a major decline in the value our society places on education and work; traditional routes of upward mobility for semi-skilled workers have largely disappeared; and the patience to defer gratification is no longer assured.

At-risk youth are frequently motivated by values, standards, and goals different from those of mainstream youth. While generational mistrust is not a new phenomenon, it appears to have become more common in recent years. The young are less likely to conform to the beliefs of previous generations and are more likely to feel disconnected from mainstream culture and behavior. In some important respects, youngsters have replaced the public and family socialization processes with one more dependent on peer influence as a source of personal identity. Clearly, changes in the family structure, the decline in the perceived "relevance" of schooling, and an erosion in the authority of other public and private institutions have alienated many youth from society. Such alienation may place these youth at greater risk of being affected by chronic unemployment, crime, drug addiction, and AIDS.

The problems of at-risk youth cannot be solved by the schools alone, but require a concerted, collaborative effort by a variety of agencies. Partnerships between the schools and a wide variety of agencies are required to meet the challenge of returning at-risk youth to the mainstream culture. Schools are often unfairly criticized for not having an answer for all of society's problems. It is for this reason that all relevant institutions in New Jersey must take responsibility for the fate of this generation of young people.

Expanding the Role of the Schools

A broad range of topics was covered by the Task Force. Implicit in these discussions, and testimony by outside experts, was the acknowledgment that far too many young people in today's society are at risk of being unable to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Task Force members further understood that reforming the school system in New Jersey is necessary to meet the needs of the modern student. The current school system was designed for a simpler era: when young people were expected to spend summers working on farms, where the family structure was intact, when job requirements were based on physical rather than mental abilities. Schools no longer exist in this environment, but rather in one where drugs and violence destroy the lives of too many, where students have too much unstructured time and diminshed expectations for successful careers and lives.

The Task Force's primary objective is to enhance the prospects of young people for obtaining the level of employment-related skills required for success in the modern labor market. To accomplish this ambitious task, schools must be made more responsive to the employment needs of students - their orientation and curriculum must be more closely correlated to the demands of the labor market.

A major assumption made by Task Force members is that students must stay in school. In only the rarest of cases is a student advantaged by dropping out of school. It is also understood that many students who physically stay in school have dropped out psychologically – they become disengaged from the curriculum and the life of the school. Indeed, the skill demands of the global economy will require students to stay in school through grade fourteen, not grade twelve. The high skill/high wage jobs of the future will necessitate postsecondary education as well as a commitment to lifelong learning.

The extent to which schools enrich their curriculum with work-related experiences will reduce the number of students who drop out of school. There was strong conceptual agreement within the Task Force that schools must come to assume a larger role in the lives of their students. For at-risk students, schools must be a key contributor to reinforcing family values, including the direct relationship between work and the quality of life. This led to strong endorsement of the Department of Human Service's "School-Based Youth Services" program and the FamilyNet initiative currently being carried out by an inter-agency workgroup consisting of the Departments of Community Affairs, Corrections, Education, Health, Higher Education, Human Services, Labor, the SETC, community agencies and business representation. These two efforts seek to bring vital social services to the schools and extend needed services to the parents of the students in New Jersey's poorest districts.

By bringing the schools closer to the labor market, the Task Force wants the schools to use the entire educational experience to better prepare youth for meaningful and productive careers, while simultaneously using the career relevance of academic learning as a way of motivating students to achieve educationally. The duality separating academic and vocational learning is artificial. **Indeed, the reluctance to give meaningful status to occupational education as a way of avoiding "tracking" in the name of equality has produced an educational system in America that is more glaringly unequal in its outcomes than that of any other advanced industrial nation.**

Barriers to Student Success

The Task Force devoted special attention to the needs of those youth who had left school. Recent studies have concluded that the dropout rate, particularly in the urban districts, is appallingly high . In some of these districts more than half of those students who begin high school fail to graduate. There are few jobs at decent wages available for those with high school diplomas, much less for those who are dropouts.

The barriers to establishing such an educational environment are formidable. A major tenet of the Commission's ***Unified State Plan for New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System*** holds that for reasons of both equity and diversity in the workforce, the *talents of all citizens must be utilized if the economy is to prosper.*

Young Women

A recent study by the American Association of University Women, *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls*, demonstrates how "girls are systematically discouraged from courses of study essential to their future employability and economic well-being." The educational experiences of girls, according to the Report, frequently renders their circumstances and needs invisible. This is often expressed in subtle interactions in the classroom which diminish the value of their participation, serving to lower their self-esteem and limit their career aspirations. Other problems that face young women, such as the alarming rise in teenage pregnancies, often prove to be insuparable barriers to career success and demand responsive public policies. The Task Force strongly supports the SETC's affirmation of the importance of gender equity as it continues to pursue an agenda of inclusiveness to assure all New Jerseyans an equal opportunity of "making it" in the global economy.

Minority Males

The Task Force was also cognizant of the special problems that plague inner-city youth, especially Black males, in obtaining the skills they need to succeed in the economy. For this population a comprehensive strategy must be developed to reverse the tide of drug abuse, dropouts, teenage pregnancies and despair that threatens to engulf a generation of urban youth. The Task Force was gratified to see the Department of Human Services establish an inter-agency conference on "Minority Males" to address this important issue.

The Minority Males Conference, along with a host of academic and governmental studies, continue to demonstrate the particular and in some sense overwhelming problems faced by minority males, especially Afro-Americans. The ***1991 Report of the 21st Century Commission on African-American Males*** pointed out that one-third of all Black families live below the poverty line and half of all Black children will spend their youth growing up in poor, often single parent families. About one out of four Black males between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine is in jail. Suicide rates for young Black males have tripled since 1960 and their unemployment rate is more than twice that of White males.

Events in South Central Los Angeles are a glaring reminder of the violence, massive unemployment and atmosphere of hopelessness and despair that affect too many African-American youth. This Task Force strongly advocates that, as priorities for the programs are developed through these recommendations, the needs of these youngsters be given special consideration. As suggested in other parts of this report and by the ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System,*** the future economy requires enhanced skills for all workers - all sources of human capital must be tapped.

To the extent that a diminution in the ambitions, expectations and hopes of at-risk youth has been shaped by a lack of positive work experiences, it is axiomatic that enhancing the opportunity for youth to succeed at work will change these attitudes. The Task Force strongly believes the values, standards and goals of at-risk youth will be positively influenced by a revitalized educational experience. *Indeed, the creation of a new educational environment where cultural diversity is respected, where the ambitions of young women are given full expression and where the satisfaction of being a skilled and productive worker is celebrated, is the goal of the Task Force.*

Who are the At-Risk Youth?

In defining at-risk youth, the Task Force was mindful that the mismatch between the demands of the evolving labor market and the skill level of young people is not simply the problem of minorities or the poor. The risk of being unemployable or only being qualified for minimum wage jobs applies to far too many of our youth, suburban as well as urban. Indeed, a recent study, ***Learning A Living: A Blueprint For High Performance,*** (A SCANS report for America 2000), highlights both the necessity of obtaining postsecondary education and the particular problems of minorities. The report asserts there is an alarming growth in men with high school diplomas earning less than the amount necessary to support a family of four above the poverty line.

. . . In 1989 more than two out of five African-American men, one in three Hispanic men, and one in five White men, all with high school diplomas did not earn enough to lift a family of four out of poverty. Unless there is a second wage earner, their families will not have what most would call a decent living.

Therefore, any definition of at-risk youth must acknowledge the pervasiveness of the problem in order to offer systemic changes to the way youth are prepared for the world of work. In pursuit of this objective the Task Force developed the following definition of at-risk youth:

> **At-risk youth include youth who are not doing well in school or who have dropped out and whose behavior and/or background serve as predictors for dependency, i.e., being unable to achieve a good job at good wages. This definition includes youth up to and including age 21.**

Young people who are at risk exist on a continuum of vulnerability to under-employability or un-employability. Therefore, the Task Force amplified this definition by positing some of the life conditions that placed youth at risk of being unable to achieve economic self-sufficiency:

- being unemployed and out of school;
- being a school-age single parent;
- being born to a mother who is drug or alcohol dependent;
- having parent(s) who place(s) little value on education and have negative or low expectations for success for their children.

Additionally, the Task Force outlined some of the behaviors that correlate with at-risk youth:

- exhibiting disruptive school behavior and chronic school truancy;
- lagging behind in basic skills/academic achievement;
- experiencing family trauma such as divorce, separation, death or unemployment;
- experiencing personal and/or family drug/alcohol abuse;

- having contact with the judicial system resulting in criminal conviction or designation as an adjudicated delinquent.

These are broad characteristics of youth whose opportunity for entering careers with solid futures is at risk. The increase in the numbers of young people who fit these categories reflects the profound changes in American society which have emerged over the past generation. While the Task Force did not determine the exact number of at-risk youth, it did present some disturbing data:

- Overall, New Jersey school dropout rates are between 16 and 23 percent depending on measurement technique. Urban dropout rates are in the 40 to 60 percent range.
- Dropouts are 3 1/2 times more likely to be arrested and 6 times more likely to become unmarried parents than those who graduate.
- According to the New Jersey Basic Skills Council, too many high school graduates entering college lack proficiency in verbal skills (42%), computation (46%), and elementary algebra (61%).
- Graduates from "special needs" public school districts had much greater percentages in the "lack proficiency" category in all areas when compared to public school graduates from "non-special needs" districts.
- Even though there was a decline in the estimated youth population, the juvenile arrest rate has remained stable.
- Mothers of children under 6, the fastest-growing segment of new entrants to the labor force in the 1980s, struggle to find childcare solutions. Nationally some 1.3 million latchkey children ages 5 to 14 are left to fend for themselves for much of the day.
- New Jersey's overall unemployment rate is currently 6.9%, with the national teen unemployment rate at 19.8% and the rate for Black teens at 36.9%

These figures portray a dismal picture of the status of youth in our society. Moreover, it is apparent that the slow recovery from recession now being experienced in America and New Jersey, continues to exacerbate the situation for youth. At the time the first At-Risk Youth Task Force met, the national and state economies were undergoing enormous expansion. A contracting economy increases the vulnerability of youth to unemployment, dropping out of school and a host of other negative behaviors.

The Task Force recommendations focus on issues involving preparation for employment and economic self-sufficiency. Clearly, the severity of the problems facing young people requires a series of polices that go well beyond workforce readiness. Pre-natal counseling, teen parenting, drug counseling, the availability of health care and housing, the expansion of

Head Start and New Jersey's Good Start program are among the policies required to ameliorate the problems of youth. The Task Force strongly encourages the rapid implementation, at both the national and state level, of a youth oriented strategy. The recommendations that follow are narrower, concentrating on policies to link at-risk youth with the workforce readiness system and, ultimately, to the labor market.

"Traditionally, the American system of education has treated students as either vocational or academic. This distinction has become increasingly inappropriate as the nature of work has changed. Today, graduates of the vocational system must be competent in ways historically reserved for those in college programs, incorporating such skills as critical thinking, effective communication and appropriate knowledge application, while academic education must engage students in experimental and applied learning."

Governor's Economic Conference:
Workforce Quality Task Force

The seven recommendations of the Task Force are interconnected. They are designed to offer students a wider variety of choices than is currently available, as well as to bridge the gap between academic and occupational education. The sweeping nature of the proposed recommendations may mean extension of the school day and year. The Task Force believes that such an approach offers the best way of preparing students and dropouts for the labor market of the future. That market demands a workforce with advanced language, mathematics and reasoning skills. Americans must become a people who can think for a living.

The Commission's ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System*** emphasizes lifelong learning because workers will change jobs five or six times during their careers. This means that students must be taught not only a specific set of work-related skills, but also the ability to "learn how to learn." It also means that those students who do not seek a traditional four-year college education when they are in their teens may well do so in their twenties, thirties or even later. Lifelong learning requires an attitude about education that is not defined by age, but by the demands of the labor market as well as the innate desire of people to learn. The trinity of "education, work and retirement" must be amended to make learning constant throughout one's life. The best argument against tracking students in the European or Japanese fashion is that it forecloses future educational options. The vision of the At-Risk Youth Task Force calls for an expansion, not a limitation of individual choice.

The principles derived from learning theory underlying the Task Force's recommendations state that practical learning is important for preparing students for the labor market. This point is buttressed by research in the cognitive sciences which demonstrates that academic learning takes place best in applied contexts such as mentoring and apprenticeships. Additionally, the service-learning movement persuasively argues for an integration of practical experiences into the core academic curriculum.

Recommendations

"One reason for the nation's 29% high school dropout rate is that young people don't see a clear connection between what they are supposed to learn in class and what they need to succeed in a career."

Why Kids Should Learn About Work
Fortune - Special Report, August 1992

Recommendation 1. Schools must be brought closer to the demands of the labor market. Students must be offered a menu of options during their time in school to help them make informed choices about their academic and career futures. Included in this comprehensive employment oriented program are the following areas:

- career exploration;
- employment experience;
- business mentoring; and
- transition to the world of work.

This program must be made available to **both** in-school and out-of-school youth.

Description:

It is recommended that beginning with grade one, a career education program be developed that provides students with more information on making career choices as well as the opportunity to experience specific occupations through a coordination of academic year and summer opportunities. Schools can facilitate the opportunity to acquire more knowledge about the skills required by the world of work as a natural component of the learning environment through various partnerships with business and labor that may include mentoring, job shadowing and work experience.

Drawing on the State of Florida's ***Blueprint For Career Preparation,*** such a workforce relevant course of study could include the following six career preparation steps.

A. Beginning in kindergarten through fifth grade, students should develop an awareness of self and the value of work and be exposed to careers and technology.

B. By grade six, students – with the help of the teachers and parents – should assess personal aptitudes, abilities and interests and relate them to careers. They should also learn the role of technology in the world of work.

C. In grades seven and eight, students should set career-oriented goals and develop four-year career plans for grades nine through twelve. These plans may change as they are reviewed annually, but it sets students on a course and provides a basis for curriculum selection. Parents need to be intimately involved in this process.

D. During high school, a new "applied curriculum" will make academic concepts relevant to the workplace, especially in communications, math and science. Vocational courses will be closely coordinated with academic instruction.

E. Students choosing postsecondary education programs should be able to successfully gain employment, advance within their fields or change occupations. These programs include vocational technical centers, community colleges and universities.

F. Educators should intensify efforts to share information and to involve parents, business, and the entire community in the career process.

This is a **systemic** change to the existing K-12 method of delivering academic and vocational education. It is required to bring about real change and obtain for all students the skills necessary to succeed in our society. Special provisions should be developed that deal specifically with those students who are determined to be at risk. A specific programmatic emphasis on easing the transition from school to work should be established. A key part of this effort should encompass, minimally, the last six months of the traditional senior year in high school and at least six additional months of post high school graduation tasks leading to a job placement. The business, labor and the school communities must collaborate in the framing of this comprehensive effort.

For all youth, but particularly those who are at risk, consistent exposure to the world of work is crucial in helping them learn about the norms and expectations of business. For at-risk youth living in the inner city , the opportunity for working with and observing the behavior of the business community is vital in helping to shape their ambitions. All too often such youth have a starkly limited vision of the employment possibilities available or the skills they need to succeed in certain occupations.

Recommendation 2. Create youth apprenticeship opportunities as described in the proposed "National Youth Apprenticeship Act of 1992."

Description:

(*NOTE:* Historically, confusion over the use of the word apprenticeship in contexts other than the strong foundation of traditional craft and industrial "apprenticeship" has created concern among interested parties, particularly organized labor. A first step in developing this new national concept of youth apprenticeship is to reach an understanding among all parties on how to protect and preserve what currently works in traditional apprenticeships, while expanding approaches identified within "youth apprenticeship.")

National Youth Apprenticeship Model

Youth Apprenticeship, as used in its national context, is an innovative approach to linking students to the labor market in high skill and high wage jobs. New youth apprenticeship opportunities must be forged to vastly expand the choices for young people. At-Risk youngsters in particular need many of the benefits offered by youth apprenticeships - goal orientation, mentoring, income and discipline. As is the case with cooperative education, apprenticeship is an excellent way of fully involving the business and labor communities with the schools.

The proposed federal program envisions a youth apprenticeship agreement which includes commitments by the trainees and parents, employers (including providing a mentor) and the school. The agreement would also include a provision setting forth the educational and occupational credentials to be obtained. Specific components include:

- A program of study which meets state education standards;
- Instruction to meet academic proficiency in at least five core subjects of English, mathematics, history, science and geography;
- Relevance of instruction to the workplace;
- Instruction in occupationally specific skills and abilities;
- A planned program of structured job training;
- Development of sound work habits and behaviors;
- Instruction in general workplace competencies;
- Worksite learning and experience which includes paid work experience;
- Fulfillment of the employer commitments in the youth apprenticeship agreement; and
- A provision for career guidance and information.

Maine Youth Apprenticeship Model

One model of youth apprenticeships worthy of possible replication in New Jersey can be found in the State of Maine. That model recognizes that youth apprenticeship "...offers a new approach that can break new ground in educating the workforce of the next century." The major features of the Maine Youth Apprenticeship Program are:

- *Ninth Grade:* Career Exploration and Regular Academic Program. Students are encouraged to begin setting education and career goals. They are assisted in this process by Job Specialists who will follow students through their apprenticeships, easing their transition to work.

- *Tenth Grade:* Regular academic programs, testing in core learning (academic skills, motivation, and social maturity), focused career exploration, apprenticeship selection testing and apprenticeship chosen.

- *Eleventh Grade:* First year of apprenticeship consisting of twenty weeks of high school and thirty weeks working for an employer.

- *Twelfth Grade:* Second year of apprenticeship consisting of twenty weeks of high school and thirty weeks working for an employer. Student receives high school diploma.

- *Thirteenth Grade:* Third year of apprenticeship consisting of sixteen weeks in a Technical College and thirty-four weeks working for an employer. Student receives a one-year Technical College Certificate and Certificate of Initial Mastery. This latter certificate is a guarantee that the student meets the specified standards. If those standards are not met the student can return to school at no cost to the employer.

After graduation, apprentices can continue lifelong learning and obtain Associates, Bachelors or Advanced degrees. The Maine program has self-consciously adapted aspects of the German and Danish apprenticeship systems, but maintains an "Americanized" design to assure students the opportunity to continue with their education if they so choose.

Recommendation 3. The Departments of Education and Higher Education should develop joint strategies for linking cooperative education programs between secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as for improving their quality.

Description:

The lack of connectivity and collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions in the area of cooperative education must be addressed. A simplified, career oriented program must be developed that will assure cooperative education students with the training and work experience necessary to obtain a job with a future. Special attention should be paid to assuring that cooperative programs do not teach limited skills leading to dead end jobs.

Cooperative Education has the potential to be a cornerstone of a labor market oriented school system. Key to enhancing cooperative education is organizing it around specific industries, especially those involving small and medium sized firms. To accomplish this, the Department of Commerce should be asked to help organize industry by sector to rationalize the relationship between business and the schools.

Recommendation 4. Expand summer work experience programs for in-school youth to include structured employment training, job tryout and shadowing. Business partnerships in this area must be expanded. The goal of the summer youth program should be to foster enhancement of employment competencies and general education development of at-risk youth. The summer work experience must be integrated into the regular school year and not be seen as separate from it. In planning for summer work experience programs, Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) should coordinate with FamilyNet.

Description:

Bringing the educational system closer to the labor market requires creative use of the summers. While many students work over the summer, as they do during the school year, programs need to be established to make the summer work experience educationally valuable as well as financially beneficial.

Students need to gain a broader understanding of their work experiences by combining them with systematic teaching of employability skills. Of particular importance in this area is the JTPA summer program. In working with the previous Task Force, the JTPA system made significant strides in fulfilling the goals of the Title II-B summer program by emphasizing classroom training and linkages with local schools. By establishing a joint planning process between SDAs and FamilyNet a more comprehensive series of summer programming would be possible. FamilyNet's role would be to provide JTPA summer youth and their families with the needed social support services.

Recommendation 5. Enhance and expand the Department of Higher Education's efforts to establish closer collaboration between institutions of higher education and the public schools. In addition, the Executive Branch of government, in developing implementation strategies for this recommendation should explore specific collegiate programs like the successful College Bound and Trio. These programs should be expanded to carrying out the objectives of this recommendation e.g., expanding higher educational opportunities for youth at risk.

Description:

The three goals of College Bound are:

A. Improve urban/minority secondary students' academic achievements and graduation rates;

B. Strengthen student's aspirations for postsecondary education; and

C. Increase the college admission, retention and graduation rates of these students.

All the College Bound programs provide on-campus support services and academic enrichment oriented toward science, mathematics and technology and include the following features:

- four to six week summer program;
- academic year weekday and/or Saturday program;
- individual and group counseling;
- tutoring;
- career awareness speakers, counselors and field trips;
- cultural appreciation and enrichment activities and field trips;
- exposure to positive minority role models; and
- parent programs and enrichment activities.

Trio is designed to retain marginally prepared students in college by offering an array of services which will enhance counseling, guidance, remediation and opportunities for academic enrichment through learning laboratories.

The Task Force strongly advocates closer collaboration between institutions of higher education and the public schools. These cooperative endeavors should include curriculum development, enhanced teacher training and joint programs like Tech-Prep recommended in the ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System.***

Recommendation 6. Expand the School-Based Youth Services Program. The variety of support services supplied by this program should be more closely tied to the workforce readiness system to meet the needs of youth and their families. To accomplish this, the program's employment component which includes job tryout, community service work experience, job shadowing, among others, should be expanded for greater success.

Description:

The School-Based Youth Services Program provides comprehensive services on a one-stop shopping basis in or near schools during and after normal school hours to children, youth and families. The goal of the program is to have students graduate from high school, obtain employment or continue their education and be mentally and physically healthy and drug free. The program is located in thirty school districts (urban, rural and suburban) across New Jersey, at least one in each county. Additionally, five of these sites are in public vocational high schools. In 1990 the program served over 18,000 students on an individual basis. Just using the individual services figures results in a cost of $200 per pupil making it highly cost effective.

The School-Based Youth Services Program offers a full range of services including recreation, drug counseling, family counseling, mental health, primary and preventive health care and employment assistance. A major reason for the success of the program is that these services are available to **all** students on a non-categorical basis, thereby, attaching no stigma to participation. This allows youth, in a safe and supportive environment, to gain access to caring adults who assist in decision-making. By linking education, health, labor and human services professionals in a single program, the School-Based approach has established the partnerships of diverse agencies that are needed to begin to transform the schools. Strong and clearly articulated linkages with the JTPA system is a key component of this partnership.

In 1991, this program won the Ford Foundation/Kennedy School of Government Innovations Award as an exemplary state innovation. The program has been replicated in the States of Kentucky, Iowa, and most recently California. By adapting an explicit employment oriented curriculum consistent with the framework established in the first recommendation, the School-Based Youth Services Program will become a cornerstone in enhancing school and business partnerships.

Recommendation 7. Expand the number of New Jersey Youth Corps program sites and the number of youngsters it serves. Additionally, an explicit vocational education component should be added in order to facilitate the transition between the Corps and the world of work, education and training. Similarly, a first semester college transition curriculum should be developed by the Department of Education (currently responsible for administering the program) and the Department of Higher Education.

Description:

The nationally recognized New Jersey Youth Corps should be expanded to include more program sites to serve more dropouts. Youth Corps currently serves over 1100 dropouts in eleven sites throughout the State. The program's activities consist of one-half day of classroom instruction and one-half day of community service work. The former is geared toward high school completion, usually in the form of a General Education Diploma (GED). The community service component involves Corpsmembers in a range of jobs including housing rehabilitation, the construction of a children's museum, social service and environment work, among others. Additionally, counseling, employability skills and placement (job and educational) services are part of the program offerings.

The length of the program should be expanded to offer vocational training to those Corpsmembers who seek to enter the labor force. This expansion should also be consistent with the framework established in the first recommendation. Support from JTPA is recommended for this component. This recommendation applies to transition from the Youth Corps to the world of work and should not be construed as changing the philosophy of the Youth Corps or as sanctioning the use of Youth Corps resources for any extraneous purpose.

The community service component of the Youth Corps program will be enhanced by the recent grant from the National Community Service Commission. This grant should, in part, be used to improve the service-learning curriculum of the Corps. A close working relationship with institutions of higher education, in particular the New Jersey Institute of Technology and the Whitman Center of Rutgers University, should be forged to develop a citizenship service-learning curriculum.

Note: Youth in the criminal justice system are not directly addressed in a specific recommendation. To insure that the impact of this report is linked to youth in the criminal justice system, the State Employment and Training Commission will construct an action plan to relate these recommendations to this group of at-risk youth.

Conclusion:

The recommendations contained in this report must be understood as more than the sum of their parts. New Jersey and the nation need to construct a one track educational system that will offer all students occupational and academic experiences. The "general" course of study must be abolished in favor of one that exposes all students to an enriched and varied course of study, balancing theoretical and the applied learning. The goal of such an approach is to offer students the chance to go on to college, engage in tech-prep, cooperative education, apprenticeship or some other school-to-work program. To accomplish this goal, specific linkages between secondary and postsecondary schools are important to insure that all students have the opportunity to extend their education through, at a minimum, grade fourteen.

At-risk youth will especially benefit from this enriched set of options because they need to see the relevance of their time in school to their economic future. Indeed, it is demonstrating the relevance of school to their own ambitions that will encourage students to remain in school and those who have dropped out to return. These recommendations, then, should be seen as part of a long-term strategy to fundamentally alter our vision of educational possibilities. *The future of the American economy and standard of living of at-risk youth are dependent on producing a high skill and high wage workforce.*

The ultimate utility of the Task Force's recommendations will be to instill a sense of personal worth and responsibility in at-risk youth. *An individual's sense of his or her self-worth is reinforced when their unique abilities and talents are recognized, nurtured and employed for purposes that enrich the society .* At-risk youth need the acceptance and affirmation from the rest of society to help them validate their own self-worth. Learning to value work and education are important elements in re-directing the lives of at-risk youth.

These recommendations will offer many more choices for young people and improve the labor pool for employers. They are consistent with the call for collaborative programming articulated by the previous Task Force. The recommendations are also consistent with the overarching goals of the ***Unified State Plan For New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System.*** One of the workforce readiness system's greatest challenges is meeting the employment needs of at-risk youth. The Task Force strongly believes that the adoption and implementation of these recommendations will substantially reduce the dropout rate, provide far greater opportunity to youth to obtain decent employment and, in the end, reconnect a generation of youth to the mainstream of American life.

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